

New Sedley Chapter On Ancient Greek Atheism

Post by “Eikadistes” of March 25, 2022 at 12:07 PM

After researching a bit, some of the rituals and traditions surprised me. While I often think of Epicurus’ theism in terms of someone with a conservative mentality, social norms in ancient Greece make the word “conservative” unhelpful by comparison to my American eyes. Wine drunkenness seemed to have been a central feature, as did (possibly) public sexual intercourse, and a vibe that seems to me to be a mix between the *Day of the Dead* and *Carnival*.

I observe how readily non-Mexican and non-Irish Americans celebrate the non-civic, but totally fun *Cinco de Mayo* and *St. Patrick’s Days*, versus how the civic, but totally non-fun *Columbus Day* has little ritualistic value to supporters (except as a political symbol for contemporary cultural tensions). If the ancient Greeks were as smart as the owners of some of the theatres in which I have performed, I have to imagine that they were smart enough to get their audiences drunk (makes for a better show), and (what a coincidence), Greek religion was, *literally*, the origin of theatre.

In general, ancient Greek civic holidays seem to have been celebrations associated with sensual indulgence. I wonder if that’s why Epicurus was pro-religious celebration. He wasn’t exactly avoiding red meat for Lent, or fasting for Ramadan (nor were his gods). The festival (Khoës) the author names was fairly orgiastic. I am curious if Epicurus’ philosophical opponents looked at civic holidays with suspicion, and, instead, preferred more private, esoteric practices.